MARGERY'S CHRISTMAS BOX

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ON THROUGH THE CROWDED STREETS SHE HURRIED.

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MARGERY'S CHRISTMAS-BOX.

BY

RUTH ELLIOTT.

London:
WESLEYAN CONFERENCE OFFICE,
2, CASTLE-STREET, CITY-ROAD,
SOLD AT 66, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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Margery's Christmas Box.

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CHAPTER THE FIRST.

It was a bitterly cold night, with the snow lying thick upon the ground, and a keen east wind sweeping round the corners, chilling the blood of the passers to and fro. Shawls and coats were drawn tightly round the throats of their wearers, as they encountered the cutting blasts; and they hurried along, intent upon reaching, as soon as possible, the warmth and comfort of the fire-side.

It wanted only a week to Christmas, and the shops were gay with decorations. Evergreens and bright-

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coloured paper-flowers festooned the windows. The scarlet berries of the holly gleamed through the glossy foliage, while here and there a few pearly mistletoe drops excited the roguish jokes and merry repartees of the young men and maidens, who paused in the brilliant light shed from door and window.

Margery Rayner cast many a wistful glance at the tempting articles displayed for sale; but they did not arrest her steps. On through the crowded streets she hurried, with a large basket in one hand, and a bundle in the other. The clocks were striking eleven when leaving the busy streets she turned into one of the dark narrow courts which lay thickly around. A contrast was that court to the street without. Noise there was certainly, and light, but of a different sort. The light was dim, and streamed through dirty, broken windows; the noise was made by drunken men and women, and quarrelling children.

Many a hand was extended to stop her as she picked her way through the busy throng, for she was well known; but sometimes with a shudder, sometimes with a smile, she evaded them all, and turning at last into a doorway, toiled wearily up a narrow, rickety, staircase.

"Margery!" exclaimed a little glad voice, as she opened a door at the top of the house. "Oh! I'm so glad! I thought you were never coming."

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"All in the dark!" said Margery cheerfully. "Why, where is your candle, Gracie, and what have you done with the fire?"

"I thought you'd be home early and bring some coal," replied Gracie remorsefully; "so I was extravagant and emptied the box all at once, and it burnt up so quickly. There wasn't much you know, Margery, and you said you'd be home early, and bring some more."

"So I did, dear, but I was detained. I'll tell you all about it while we are having supper. See here, can you light this candle for me? My fingers are quite benumbed. I have got some coal and candles, so we 'll have a treat, Gracie."

"I knew you'd got something by your voice. Did Mrs. Green advance you some money, then?"

"Not she!" laughed Margery, breathing on and rubbing her chilled fingers to restore the circulation. I knew better than to ask her; she never pays us before Saturday; she wouldn't to keep us from starving. No, I got some money somewhere else."

"Where, Margery?"

"Extra work; you know how late I've been the last few nights? Well, I've been helping the girls to make some grand new dresses for to-morrow night; they are all going to a dance or something, and wanted me to go, too, but I wouldn't."

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"What sort of dresses were they? How could they buy grand new dresses, Margery, if they only get as much money as you do?"

"They will dress whatever they go without; but never mind them: how have you been getting on all day?"

"Oh, pretty well; my hands were too cold to work fast, and beside, I've been all in the dark this evening. I didn't light the candle because it was the last bit, and I thought you might want it. I've been sitting on the bed, wrapped up in the blanket, since the fire went out. You sit still, Margery, I'll light the fire, and lay the supper; I like to do it."

Margery sat down again, and watched the busy little fingers as they deftly laid chips and coal in the tiny grate.

"There!" said Grace, as the bright blaze flared up, "that's something like, isn't it? Where's my blower? that will draw it up."

"Draw it all out, you mean," replied Margery as the flames roared up the chimney, under the influence of the brown-paper blower.

Gracie laughed, "I hope not! I've been so bitterly cold all day, I want a warm now. By the time I've set the table there 'll be a nice clear fire, and I 'll toast your bread."

"You look quite blue with the cold, Gracie; I

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think you want to toast yourself as well as the bread."

"So I do, and so I will," replied Grace, spreading a coarse white cloth on the little round table, and reaching down plates and cups from the cupboard. "I'm going to be Cinderella and sit with my feet among the cinders, when the fire burns up; only I'm afraid my fairy-godmother will forget to call and see me to-night."

"What would you ask her to give you, if she were to come?"

"Well, I think I'd ask for something nice for supper first;" said Grace, with a sigh, as she placed part of a dry, hard loaf on the table. "I'm so tired of dry toast and weak tea, Margery."

"What would you say to a sausage by way of variety?" asked Margery playfully; holding up a small sausage on a fork. "See: will you cook it, or shall I?"

"Oh, Margery! how nice! did you buy it?"

"I do not know how else I should get it, I'm sure. I cannot steal; to beg I am ashamed. You don't know what I've got in this bundle yet, Gracie."

"What bundle? Oh, I didn't see it; what is it?"

"Some work Mrs. Green told me I might bring home and do after hours if I liked. I shall get a

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few coppers for it, and they must buy our Christmas treat. What shall we have, Gracie?"

"I don't know," said Gracie, musingly. "Let me see, what do you like best?"

"It is not what I like. I like anything. You must choose what you like yourself; it's your birthday as well as Christmas-day, you know."

"Yes; doesn't it seem funny to have a birthday on Christmas-day?"

"I thought it funny ten years ago," replied Margery, laughing. "I was only eight years old, but I remember it so well. Father came and told me to guess what Christmas-box mother had got for him and me."

"Did you guess?"

"No, I couldn't; so father took me into mother's room and showed me the new baby. I was so disappointed, for you were such an ugly little thing, Grace."

"Ugly babies always grow up pretty," replied Grace, gravely. "But didn't you think I was a queer sort of a Christmas-box, Margery? Anyhow it was one you've kept a long time."

"It was a very useful present. I am sure I do not know what I should have done without my little housekeeper all these long years since father died. Come, Mrs. Cook, I'm sure that sausage is nearly done."

"It soon will be; doesn't it smell nice! You

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are my fairy-godmother, Margery, you give me all my nice things."

"I don't get you many dear, I wish I could Don't you feel so well to-night?" and Margery looked. anxiously at the thin little face, from which the colour, caused by the excitement of cooking, was fast fading.

"It has been so cold all day, and my cough has been so troublesome," said Grace, wearily.

"You will feel better after you have had your supper, dear. I expect you are quite faint for want of something;" and stooping, Margery took the plate and fork out of the child's hands. "Have you had anything since your tea?"

"I didn't have any tea. I couldn't eat that bread, Margery, and there was not enough fire to toast it, or to warm up the tea."

"Nothing since noon! No wonder you feel faint. Now come and eat a good supper."

Grace rose and took her seat at the table, but seemed too tired to eat. Leaning her head on her hand, she watched her sister divide—very unequally—the sausage, giving her the larger portion, and pour out the tea; but her appetite had fled. For Margery's sake she swallowed a few mouthfuls, and then pushed the plate away.

I can't eat it, Margery, indeed I can't," she said sorrowfully. "It's very nice, but—"

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Margery saw that it was useless to urge her, so taking the plate away, she said cheerfully, "You will like it cold for breakfast, dear. Put some of this toast in your tea, you can manage that. After supper I will sing you to sleep."

Gracie smiled. "I'm a regular baby, Margery! Fancy a great big girl being sung to sleep!"

"Pity I haven't got a cradle for you," replied her sister, jokingly. "Father used to like to rock you to sleep; but he liked best to walk up and down the room with you till you fell asleep,—poor father!"

The sisters were silent—busy with memories of the past, while Margery cleared the table, and taking out her work, drew up to the fire. Gracie looked up.

"Why, Margery, it is just twelve; you won't begin work!"

"I can do a few stitches while you are getting into bed. I want to get this work done."

"Then let me help—do, Margery."

"No, indeed! You ought to have been in bed hours ago. Give me the little hymn book, and I will sing to you while you undress."

Grace fetched the book from the shelf, and kneeling down by the bright little fire, turned over the pages in search of her favourite hymns. Suddenly she lifted her head, and with an involuntary shiver drew close to her sister.

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"He's coming home, Margery;—listen!" she whispered, while every bit of colour left her face.

Heavy drunken steps were heard ascending the stairs, and a rough voice poured forth volleys of coarse oaths and curses. Then the door opposite the sisters' room flew open, and a woman's shrill voice was raised in passionate anger and reproach.

Breathlessly Margery and Grace listened as the voices grew higher and higher, till the door slammed to, and only a loud confused murmur reached their ears.

"That's how he nearly always comes home," whispered Grace. "Oh, Margery, I am so frightened sometimes! Suppose he were to come in here and kill me! I often think he is going to kill his wife."

"I don't think he is likely to come in here, dear. You are so quiet; I dare say he doesn't even know you are in the room!"

"Oh yes, he does. Mrs. Whalley comes here for things sometimes. She came for a match this morning, and then I saw him and he saw me through the open door. I always keep the door locked, but he could easily break it open if he liked," and Grace cast a frightened glance at the door.

"I wish they would leave, and some nice quiet people come, who would be company for you, Gracie, while I am away."

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"Oh, so do I! Mrs. Whalley wants me to go in there sometimes, but I have never been."

"No," said Margery, quickly; "don't go there Gracie. I cannot bear to leave you all day now; but if I thought you were with those people I should be wretched."

"I should be afraid to go," replied Grace, shuddering. "I always begin to pray when I hear his step on the stairs."

"That is the best thing you can do, dear," said Margery, tenderly. "No one can hurt you if Jesus takes care of you. I ask Him to do so many times in the day?"

"Do you? What do you say?" asked Grace, wistfully.

"I ask Him to make your cough better, and to keep you from catching cold," said Margery, sewing industriously.

"What else, Margery?"

"Well, I ask Him to keep you from feeling lonely, and to come and be with you Himself, while I am away."

Grace looked eagerly up, "Oh, Margery—I never thought! Do you think it is Jesus who puts all my thoughts into my head—my nice thoughts I mean—when I shut my eyes and fancy all sorts of lovely things? Do you think it is Jesus doing it to keep me from being lonely?"

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"I think it is very likely, dear; what sort of lovely things do you fancy?"

"Oh, all sorts. Sometimes I fancy I'm in the country with flowers and birds and trees all round; and sometimes I fancy I'm in a beautiful room, with a splendid fire, and soft carpets, and easy chairs and couches—and lots of books, bound in purple and blue and gold, with plenty of pictures in them. Sometimes"—and the child's voice grew low and dreamy—"I shut my eyes tight, and try to fancy I'm in heaven; but somehow it all comes like the pictures of the country that I've seen. There are trees, and rivers, and flowers, and all that, you know; but I can't fancy what Jesus is like one bit. What is your thought of Him, Margery?"

"I saw a beautiful picture of Him once," said Margery, "and I suppose I have taken my idea from that. It was such a mournful face, so full of sorrow, yet so full of love too. I can't describe it, Gracie."

"Don't you think He must look sorrowful when He comes down this court? The people are all so wicked. But do you think He ever comes in the court—do you think He ever goes into Mrs. Whalley's room?"

"I don't know—they don't want Him there, Gracie; but I'm sure He is ready to go the moment He sees they do want Him."

"Then," continued Grace, "do you think He tells

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one of the angels to watch there, and go and tell Him when they want Him?"

"Likely enough; you know they say everybody has a good and a bad angel always with them. The bad angel tries to make them wicked, and the good one whispers to them about Jesus and heaven, and tries to teach them to love God."

"I suppose it's my bad angel whispering to me when I get cross; I wish he'd been away; I'm sure I don't want him." A violent fit of coughing interrupted the child, and shook her from head to foot. In a few minutes the paroxysm passed, leaving her white and exhausted, and the little fair head drooped wearily on her sister's knee.

Margery bent tenderly over her. "My darling, you ought to be in bed."

"Yes, I'll go; but don't sing to me if you are tired, Margery."

"Singing doesn't tire me; it rests me. What shall I sing first?"

"Oh, my favourite—father's favourite, you know."

Margery took the book, and to the tune "Red-head" sang the well-worn words—

"Jesu, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high:

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Hide me, O my Saviour hide,
Till the storm of life be past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last!"

Through the closed door and down the staircase floated the low, sweet strains, and a head in the room below was lifted from its pillow to listen. Strange sound in that sin-haunted place:

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me:
All my trust on Thee is stayed;
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing."

On Margery sang, little dreaming that in the room below hot tears were rolling down cheeks long strangers to them, and lips long used to words of sin were murmuring, "'Leave, ah! leave me not alone.' My mother used to sing that long years ago. My poor old mother!" And the seared conscience of the grey-haired man lashed him with its long, silent memories. Memories of a pure and innocent childhood, a happy, honourable boyhood, but of a wretched, degraded manhood.

At length Margery ceased singing, and stealing noiselessly to the bedside, bent over the little sleeper.

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Yes, Gracie slept, and the sister's eyes filled with tears as she marked how the blue veins showed through the delicate transparent skin; while the hectic flush and hurried breathing told only too plainly that the Master had bidden the gardener transplant the fair little flower to a brighter and better world.

It was no sudden revelation of the truth to Margery. She had watched with an aching heart the gradual fading of her darling; but to-night it struck her with unusual force, and sinking on her knees, she covered her face with her hands. "Oh, dear Father," she prayed, with the hot tears rolling down between her fingers, "do not take her yet! I cannot give her up—my precious little sister. Thou knowest, Lord, what she has been to me—how the thought of her has kept me from sin, and brought me safely home, when I have been sorely tempted to stray from Thy fold. Do not take her yet, Lord! she is too pure for this world, I know, but oh! I cannot do without her! I cannot give her up! All day long the thought of her gives me heart to work, and is a barrier between me and the world. It is so hard to be good—so hard, Lord! In this wide world I have no one but Thee and her to help me. I have sometimes thought Thou didst give her to me on purpose to keep me from evil, and I have looked upon her as Thine own gift to me—Thine own precious Christmas gift! Ever since

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mother died I have watched over her, and loved her more than anything else on earth, and if she is taken I shall be left alone! The thought of it is more than I can bear!—oh! spare her, Lord, for the sake of Thy Son."

There was silence for some minutes in the little room, and then Margery rose from her knees. The fire was still burning brightly, and she carefully took off the live coals, and laid them under the grate. Then putting out the candle, she quietly got into bed, and was soon in the deep sleep of utter weariness.

A sad, but common lot was that of the sisters. Their father, a man of superior nature and education, had by numerous misfortunes been brought step by step from a position of respectability and comfort to wretched poverty. While he was with them, he had done his utmost to keep his motherless girls unspotted from the world, and his last words to Margery as he lay dying were, "Take care of the little one, Margery, my girl. Keep her along with you, and teach her to love your mother's God."

"Your God, too, father," Margery had sobbed; and the dying man whispered, "Yes, my God, too; thanks to His mercy which endureth for ever! I can trust my children to Him—the Father of the fatherless. He will never leave thee, my darling, nor forsake thee."

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That was four years ago, when Margery was only fourteen and Grace six. Since then the sisters had clung to each other with a strong and undivided affection. Margery obtained a situation at a dress-maker's, with long hours and hard work, and just sufficient pay to keep a roof over their heads and a loaf in the cupboard. Grace's tiny hands had learned to be expert in making bead trimming, and added weekly a small sum to the family exchequer. Friends they had none. True, Margery's society was sought by her companions in the work-room, but the instinctive delicacy of her nature shrank from their coarse jokes and bold, unmaidenly manners. The children in the court had ever been Grace's terror; they both frightened and repelled her. Sometimes, in the warm summer evenings, when she had gone down the stairs to watch at the door for Margery, they had called her to join their games, and when she refused had mocked and laughed at the little stranger, with her innocent child-face and timid, shrinking ways. There was only one in the whole court whom Gracie did not fear, and that was old Lee, who lived in the room beneath theirs. Often he had come to his door as she passed, and given her a smile and kindly nod. He did not often speak to her, though sometimes he stopped Margery, and asked how "the little one" was. Grace used to listen for his coming home at night, and

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had grown to feel quite an interest in their grey-haired neighbour. How he got his living they did not know; he used to go out early in the morning, and not return till ten, or half-past, at night. That he had occupied a very different position in society once, Margery had no doubt; his whole bearing and accent told of superior education and training; but alas! he had fallen as only too many have done, and are still doing.

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CHAPTER THE SECOND.

In the dim, grey light of the dull December morning Margery rose, and shivering in the biting cold, hastily dressed and lit the fire. The sound of the crackling chips awoke Grace, and snug and warm in her nest among the blankets and shawls she watched Margery get the breakfast.

"Oh dear!" she sighed, "another long day! I wish I were old enough and strong enough to go with you, Margery."

"You wouldn't like it," replied Margery, hastily; "its no place for you."

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"Well no, I don't think I should like it; but anyhow I should be with you. Don't you think you could do the work at home? Oh! wouldn't that be nice—for us to sit at work together all day!"

"Very nice," said Margery, absently.

"What are you thinking of, Margery? you look as if you were looking right through everything; —what can you see?"

"I was trying to look into the future, dear; but it is no use. I was wondering if there were no means by which I could make your life a little happier."

"Oh Margery, don't! I'm very happy generally. Don't look like that; I can't bear to see you," and Grace wound her arms lovingly round her sister's neck, as she bent over her with her morning kiss.

"You shall have your breakfast in bed this morning, Grace, and I will sit beside you. Look, I'll draw the table up, and then we'll be comfortable," said Margery, trying to force back her tears and talk cheerfully. "Dear me, what a thing it is to be a lady, and have your breakfast in bed, and a servant to wait upon you! If you please, ma'am, what will you have for breakfast? chocolate and French rolls?"

Grace laughed, and raised herself, but the slight exertion brought on a fit of coughing, and she sank back on her pillow quite exhausted.

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"I think my cough is worse," she panted, "it does hurt so."

"You will be better, darling, when the spring comes, and you can get out into the sunshine."

"There never is any sunshine in our court—it can't get in. Oh, Margery! I should like to see the country before I die."

"Don't, Gracie! you will break my heart if you talk like that!"

"Well I won't if you don't like it; but, Margery, I wish you didn't care so much," and the child's eyes were full of wistful longing.

"Care!" said Margery, bitterly, "how can I help caring! you are the only one I have in the wide, wide world, and if God takes you away, I don't know what will become of me."

"The Lord will provide," whispered Grace gently. "It will all come right, Margery."

Margery made no reply, but filling up the little brown tea-pot, brought it to the bedside.

Grace enjoyed her breakfast; the cold bit of sausage was such an unusual treat, and it was so comfortable and cosy in the warm bed. "Isn't this nice?" she said contentedly. "I feel ever so much better now. I expect I shall do a lot of work to-day. Do you think you will be late to-night, Margery?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Margery, doubt-

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fully, "this is a busy time, you know; but I shall not be later than ten. Don't sit up for me if you are tired."

"I could not go to sleep if you were not home, so I might just as well sit up. I'm reading through 'The Pilgrim's Progress' again, and I've got to Mercy's dream—where the angel came to her and put a crown on her head and a chain round her neck, and led her up to the throne. I don't wonder she laughed in her sleep, only I think I should have cried, too; it was such a nice dream."

"I don't remember it; it's a long time since I read the book. You must tell me about it when I come home. I've only just got time to read our chapter now, and then I must be off. What shall we read?"

Grace always chose the morning chapter; she had done so ever since she had been able to spell out a verse in turn with her father and Margery.

"Let us read about the Golden City then, shall we? I always like that—the two last chapters in the Bible."

Slowly and reverently the sisters read the beautiful, descriptive language of the inspired writer, and to one of them, at least, the City of God was a glorious reality. A faint colour flushed Gracie's pale cheeks, as with earnest eyes she bent over the sacred page,

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reading of the pearly gates and golden streets. More than once Margery glanced at her with pained, wistful love; her little Christmas gift seemed gliding so surely beyond her reach, and the thought of parting from her was very bitter to the sister's heart.

"I cannot bear it!" she murmured to herself, as placing the Bible back on the shelf, she proceeded hastily to wash up the breakfast things. "It is too much, Lord! too much!"

"I wonder what a jasper is," said Grace, suddenly. "It says the light of the city is like jasper, clear as crystal; what is a jasper, Margery?"

"A jasper? I think it's a lovely precious stone. Yes it is; I remember father used to talk about it."

I sometimes wish the city were just what the Bible says it is. I'd like the jasper walls and pearly gates, though I shouldn't like the golden streets, I think, it would be so bright. Do you think it's *all* figurative language, Margery?"

"Father used to say it was; but I don't think you need worry about that, Gracie; if the Bible uses such beautiful figures to give us some idea of heaven, the reality must be beyond description—more lovely than we can imagine. Now I must go; good-bye, and mind you don't work too hard and long. There's the loaf in the cupboard, and something for your dinner. I'll be back as early as I can to-night."

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The door closed, and Gracie was left alone. "Something for my dinner!" she repeated. "I wonder what it is." Jumping out of bed she ran across the floor and opened the cupboard. There stood the loaf Margery had brought home the previous night, and on a plate beside it half a cold sausage.

"Then she never ate it!" cried Grace, astonished. "Oh! Margery!" There was a world of love in those last two words. For a moment she stood looking at it, and then hastily dressing, drew her box of work from under the bed, and sat down by the fire. "Now for a good day's work; I wish it were not so dark though; I can scarcely see. If only we had plenty of coal, I'd poke the fire and have a blaze."

The little fingers worked nimbly on, and the dull, grey morning passed away. Poor little Grace! work, work, work from morn till eve; till the light gave place to darkness, and the weary little head sank in utter exhaustion on the table. Nine, ten o'clock struck, and the tired child awoke with a shiver and a start. Ten o'clock! Margery would soon be home, and the fire was nearly out!

As the fire once more blazed up, a footstep on the stairs caught Grace's ear, and she cast a fearful look at the door. Yes, it was locked securely. Slowly, staggeringly came the heavy footsteps up the stairs, and as they neared the top, a rough, drunken voice

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called loudly for a light. Grace knew the voice well; it was Whalley, drunk as usual. His wife opened her door, and came out on the landing. "There is no light," she shouted, "if you spend all the money in drink, where am I to get candles from?"

Coarsely and furiously he answered her, but she was not to be silenced. Reproaches and taunts poured forth in rapid succession, and Grace's face paled with fear. The wretched pair went into their own room, and the door banged behind them; but still the quarrel raged high and fierce. Through the wall came the sound of their voices, mad with drunken passion, and at last the door was flung open, and the woman's shrill voice called loudly for help.

"He's killing her! oh, he's killing her!" cried Grace, in an agony of terror; and, springing across the room, she unlocked and threw open the door. On the landing stood Whalley, holding in his strong, brutal grasp the thin arm of his wretched wife, and trying to force her down the stairs; but her other arm was thrown round the door-post, and she held on despairingly, crying out for help.

Heedless of her own danger—thinking only of the woman's fearful peril—Grace sprang forward. Uttering no sound—for she was speechless with intense terror—she laid her hands on the man's arm, and at the light touch he turned. The bright blaze from the

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fire in the room behind, shone full upon the little upturned face, and, as if fascinated, he gazed silently down into the blue eyes raised to his in mute agonized entreaty. For a moment he stood silent, and then, with a fierce oath, demanded what she wanted.

Not a word could she utter! In vain she strove to speak, not a sound came forth from her parted lips; and then the cruel cough came on, and she leaned against the wall, trembling from head to foot. The man's hand relaxed its hold, and the woman slipped back into the room, leaving her husband and the child alone.

Gracie held out her hand: "Don't! oh, don't!" she gasped at last.

"Don't what?" growled Whalley, but in a subdued tone.

"Don't hurt her! oh, please don't hurt her!"

"She shouldn't anger me, then;" replied the man, sullenly. "Where's that precious sister o' yourn? why don't she stay at home and take care o' you?"

Grace burst into a fit of hysterical sobs. "Oh, Margery," she wailed, "why don't you come!"

"Stop that," said Whalley, roughly but not unkindly. "There, go in and get to bed; that's the best place for you."

"You won't hurt her?" pleaded Grace through her tears, trying to force back the sobs that would rise.

"No, I won't hurt her; come, go in."

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Grace turned into the bright little room, and, closing the door, sank down on the rug, laying her head on Margery's chair. The hot tears flowed silently down her cheeks, but she brushed them resolutely away. "I won't cry," she thought, "it will vex Margery so to see me like this." But the rebellious tears would come, and every now and then a choking sob rose in her throat. And still Margery did not come.

Eleven o'clock struck, and Grace raised her head to listen. Old Lee came stumbling up the stairs and entered his room; the door slammed, and then all was silent. Where could Margery be? she had never been so late before. The minutes dragged slowly on, and the long hour seemed ages to the weary little watcher. At last the loud-voiced clocks rang out the hour of midnight, and Grace started to her feet in an agony of fear. "Twelve o'clock! oh, Margery! what is the matter? why don't you come?" she cried, with a nameless dread almost overpowering her. Opening the door, she stood at the top of the stairs, straining every nerve to catch the faintest sound from below, but all in vain. The keen biting night air came whistling and moaning through the broken window on the landing, chilling her blood, and sending a shiver through the fragile little frame; but still she stood and listened.

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Once her heart beat high with hope as footsteps began to ascend the stairs, but at the second landing they stopped, and a door opened and shut, and then all was quiet again. With quivering lips, she turned back into the now dark and desolate room. The fire was out, and her feet and hands were benumbed, but she gave that no thought. "Margery!" was the one cry of the faithful little heart.

Seating herself on the bed, she drew the blanket and shawls round her, and waited.

One o'clock rang out on the dark night, and still Margery did not come.

Two o'clock! But Grace did not hear it. The tired little head had sunk exhausted on the pillow, and the child slept.

The city bells were ringing cheerfully when she awoke, and she started up in bewilderment. The vacant place beside her brought the previous evening to her recollection, and her heart sank within her. For some minutes she sat thinking, and then with sudden resolution, began to fasten round her the shawl she had just thrown off. Reaching a little worn straw hat from the nail, she put it on; and then, kneeling down by the bed, bent her head in earnest prayer.

"Oh, dear Jesus, please take care of me, and let me go safely to Margery. I am going to the shop to

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find her, but I don't know the way, Lord; help me to find it. I am only a poor little girl, but it says in the Bible that Jesus loves little children, and when He was on earth, He took them in His arms, and blessed them. Please, dear Jesus, bless me, and take me safely to Margery."

With a lighter heart, she rose and opened the door. Mrs. Whalley was coming upstairs, and stood on one side for her to pass. "I suppose you're off to your chapel," she said; "it ain't fit for you to be out—it's such a nasty, snary morning. Where's your sister?"

"I don't know," replied Grace, with a convulsive sob; "I'm going to try and find her."

"Goodness, child! you don't mean to say she aren't been home all night?"

"No! and oh! I can't think what's the matter."

"Well, that's a queer go, anyhow; and such a quiet, steady girl as her too. Where are you going?"

"To the shop where she works."

"I thought she was a dressmaker."

"Yes, she is; but Mrs. Green keeps a shop, too; bonnets and caps, and things like that."

"Do you know the way?"

"No," replied Grace quietly, with a nervous twitch at the corners of her mouth.

The woman looked curiously at her.

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"What a queer child you are! What makes you look so white? Have you had your breakfast?"

"No, I couldn't eat anything."

"Well, come and have a cup o' tea 'long wi' me; it 'll warm you up a bit. You needn't be afraid; he ain't at home, and if he was he wouldn't hurt you. I wonder you wasn't afraid to come out like you did last night! I thought my last hour was come, sure enough!"

"I was afraid," said Grace simply, "but I didn't stay to think about that. Did he hurt you after?"

"No, he left me alone; but kept running on at your sister for not staying at home and taking care of you. He's mighty fond of children, is Steve. I sometimes think if our little 'uns had lived he 'd have been different."

"Are all your children dead?" asked Grace, taking up the cup of hot, sweet tea which Mrs. Whalley placed before her.

"Yes," said the woman, with a sigh; "our eldest girl would ha' been just your age—poor little lass! She died when she were only six. Come and sit down by the fire."

"No, thank you, I must go. I'm very much obliged to you, Mrs. Whalley."

The poor, tattered, wretched woman looked down into the sorrowful little face, and with a strange,

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unwonted gush of pure, motherly instinct, stooped and kissed it.

"Well, come in here and have a warm when you come back, if you don't find your sister."

The words struck with a cold chill to the child's heart. "*If you don't find your sister!*" Not find Margery! She hurried down the stairs trying to banish the thought. Not find Margery! Why, what would become of her if she didn't!

As she went out of the street door a rough blast of wind came sweeping up the court, and almost took her off her feet. Gasping and coughing she leaned against the wall.

"Hallo! where are you off to?" asked a voice behind her; and turning she saw old Lee coming down the stairs. "So your sister hasn't come home," he continued. "I heard you tell Mrs. Whalley. Do you know the way to where your sister works?"

"No, I was going to ask some one to tell me."

"Well, I'm going that way, and if you like to come with me I'll show you the house; but this is Sunday, and she isn't very likely to be there."

Grace had said the same thing to herself several times; but still that was the only place where there was any chance of hearing of Margery, and she hoped on against hope.

On they walked in silence,—the old grey-haired

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man, and the little girl. Crowds of people were hurrying along the streets, and the sweet-voiced bells rang out the summons to prayer; but absorbed in one thought, Grace heeded them not. It had been her greatest treat, a pleasure to be looked forward to all the week, to go to chapel on Sunday, when the weather had been warmer, and she had been stronger. Many weeks had passed now since she had last listened to the sweet hymns and chants of God's house.

At last they turned down a narrow street, and there old Lee paused.

"There, that's the house. You go and see if she is there, and I'll wait a minute for you. If she isn't there you won't know how to get home again by yourself."

Grace went to the house and pulled the bell, and in a few minutes the door was opened by a dirty slatternly little servant-girl, with her hair in papers, and her dress turned up. She stared in amazement at Grace, and for a few moments returned no answer to her question. At last she understood that one of the work girls was inquired for, and replied she knew nothing about them; they had all gone home as usual the previous night. With a heart too full for words Grace returned to the old man. He saw at a glance that her errand had been in vain, and in his way tried to comfort her.

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"I daresay she'll come home to night; she's off on the spree, perhaps; girls will be girls."

"Oh no!" said Grace sadly; "Margery's too good for that! I know she'd come home if she could; she'd never, never leave me all alone."

"Well, well, don't cry," said Lee hastily, "she 'll come home all right. Why what could happen to a big girl like that? Don't you fret, she'll be all right; perhaps she's home now waiting for you."

The words put new life into the child, and she hurried on; but her steps soon flagged, and at last she stopped, and pressing her hand to her side, leaned against some iron railings. The old man looked at her with concern.

"You're tired, aren't you? Look, we'll go in here and sit down a bit; you'd like to hear the children sing, wouldn't you?"

Taking her hand in his, he led her into a large building, and up some stairs. There was no one in sight to stop them, and they sat down on a bench on the landing. Grace could hear a voice reading, or preaching, but, too tired and faint to listen, she laid her head against the wall. Suddenly the low sweet tones of an organ fell upon her ear, now swelling, now sinking, now rising, now falling, and she sat entranced. Then there came a burst of voices—children's voices, soft and clear, and the words of a loving

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Saviour's mandate came floating down the stairs,—"Let us love one another, with a pure heart fervently." Then older voices rang out the divine command "Love one another;" and the children caught up the sweet strain, answering "Let us love one another, with a pure heart fervently."

Never before had Grace heard anything like it! never had she imagined anything so beautiful! With clasped hands and bated breath she stood up and listened. Old Lee looked sadly at the little rapt face.

"Ah, little one, they sing sweetly enough now," he whispered as the sounds died away. "It's more like angels than children, isn't it?"

"Oh! it's so beautiful! so beautiful!" murmured the child, "it's like heaven!"

"Would you like to see the children who are singing?"

"Yes, oh yes; can I?"

Rising, the old man took her hand, and went up into the gallery. The aisle was not crowded as it generally was, and they sat down in one of the recesses. At first Grace was too frightened to look around her, but a low soft "Amen" breathed by a number of childish voices close to her made her start involuntarily. Looking up she saw the quaint little children of the Foundling Hospital, in their pretty old-fashioned dress, ranged in rows on each side of the magnificent organ.

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Full of wonderment, and breathless with delight, she watched them. The high-crowned caps, the spotless capes and aprons excited her admiration, and her eye dwelt lovingly on the clasped hands and bowed heads of the tiny ones on the lowest tier.

"What is it?" she whispered to the old man; "who are they?"

"Hush! they are orphans—foundlings; this is the 'Foundling.'"

"Orphans," thought Grace. "I wonder if they'd have me here, I'm an orphan. But then I should have to leave Margery! Oh Margery!"

With that loved name the memory of her fruitless search came back with overwhelming force, and filled her eyes with tears.

The sweet, trained voices of the children again burst forth in a flood of melody, and she forgot everything except the intense pleasure of the moment.

Of the short sermon she did not hear a word; she was occupied in watching the pretty, fair little faces before her. One sweet little thing about three, especially attracted her attention. Such a loveable, innocent face, with its large blue eyes and sunny smile. She was leaning over the gallery rail, and looking down below, when suddenly the white cap floated down, down from her curly head, and alighted on the sea of upturned faces beneath. Instinctively

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the baby hand was extended to catch it in its downward flight, and then there rippled forth surely the sweetest sound those old walls had ever heard—a little child's glad merry laugh.

Grace could have laughed too, for very sympathy, but old Lee was tired of the service and drew her away. On reaching home, she mounted the steep stairs as rapidly as her weary feet and panting breath would allow. She threw open the door and looked eagerly round the dreary little room. No! Margery was not there!

With a burst of hopeless grief she sank by the side of the bed. "Oh Margery! Margery! where are you?" she wailed.

"What ain't you found her?" said a voice behind her, and Mrs. Whalley entered the room. "Don't you fret, she'll come home to-night fast enough: come and sit in my room a bit and get warm."

"Thank you!" said Grace sorrowfully; "Mr. Lee asked me to go down to his room if Margery were not here."

"Well, come into my room whenever you have a mind. Have you got anything for dinner?"

"There's some bread in the cupboard, thank you."

"I'm going to boil some 'taters for me and Steve, and I'll bring you down a couple if you like. There, run along, you look 'most froze."

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Grace felt almost frozen, and the bright blaze of Mr. Lee's cheerful fire looked comfortable and inviting. The old man had placed a chair in front of it, in readiness for his little guest, and she sat down mechanically.

"Don't worry," he said kindly; "your sister's with her friends, no doubt. Hasn't she ever left you before?"

"Oh no; never! We have never been parted since father died."

"Are your father and mother both dead?"

"Yes, I've only got Margery—but oh! I hav'n't got her now."

Old Lee looked sadly at the little bowed head. "Eh, child, we've all our troubles, sure enough. I've got mine, God knows! Doesn't it say somewhere in the Bible that man is born to trouble? Seems to me, it's time the world came to an end; there's precious little but sin and wickedness in it now. Folks doing wrong and other folks suffering for it—it's a queer world anyhow."

Still talking and grumbling he took a piece of meat from a cupboard, and knelt down before the fire to cook it. "You and I 'll have dinner together to-day, little one. What's your name?"

"Grace Rayner."

"Grace! how came you with such a name as that? they might as well have called you 'Salvation!' I've

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read of such names being given to children, but can't see any sense in it."

Grace smiled, "I think 'Salvation' wouldn't be at all a nice name to have."

"Nice! no; I remember my mother used to talk of a girl she knew who was christened that, but they always called her 'Sally,' so she might as well have been christened 'Sarah.'"

"My mother wanted me to be called 'Grace:' she died when I was a baby."

"Well, I don't know but what the name suits you. Where did your sister learn those hymns she sings sometimes?"

Grace looked up surprised. "Can you hear her sing down here?"

"Yes, plain enough; she was singing one the other night about 'Leave, ah! leave me not alone.' What is it?"

"Oh, that's in 'Jesu, Lover of my soul;' would you like to hear it? I'll go and fetch my book."

She went upstairs, and brought down the little brown hymn-book. Old Lee had spread a cloth on the table, and was warming two plates as she returned.

"Come to your dinner now," he said, "I'm sure you want it, you look so white."

They sat down by the fire, but Grace grew whiter

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and whiter. The room seemed to be going round, and, at last, with a faint sigh, she sank her head on the table, and fainted away.

Old Lee was at her side in a moment, and, lifting the child's light frame, he laid her on his bed, and bent over her in alarm.

"Come in," he shouted, as a knock was heard at the door, and Mrs. Whalley entered with a plate of smoking potatoes.

"Here, I've brought the 'taters," she began, but stopped short. "What's the matter with her—is she ill?"

"She's fainted; can't you get a drop of brandy somewhere? There's some money on the shelf."

Seizing a cup, Mrs. Whalley ran down the stairs, and in a few minutes returned breathless. "Here's some brandy; poor little mite! she's half starved to death."

They poured some of the hot brandy down her throat, and rubbed the lifeless little hands. It was strange to see the tenderness of the old man over the desolate child. "No father; no mother!" he murmured. "Poor little thing! poor little thing!"

"Aye," returned Mrs. Whalley in a low tone; "and if her sister don't come back, what 'll become of her the Lord only knows. She don't look fit for this world, and that's a fact. Steve, he says to me this morning, 'that there child aint long for this world;

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she's got the churchyard cough;' and so she has, sure enough, and I ought to know, I've heered it often enough."

"Hush! she's coming to."

The blue eyes unclosed as he spoke, and Grace looked up into the old man's face. "What's the matter with me?" she asked faintly.

"Nothing now, dear; you've been bad, but you're better now, aren't you?" and he took the wasted little hand anxiously in his.

"Better? oh, yes; I'm better now. Has Margery come back?"

"Not yet; she'll come back to-night. See, I'm going to make a couch for you by the fire, where you'll be warm and cosy." So saying, he put two chairs together, and covered them with an old coat. "Now, Mrs. Whalley, I'll lift her up, and you bring the pillow for her head. There, isn't that comfortable?"

Grace looked up gratefully. "Thank you; it's very nice."

The bright blaze flared and flickered on the bare walls of the comfortless room, and played on the features of the two so strangely brought into close companionship. Mrs. Whalley went up to her own room, and, tired and weary, Grace lay with closed eyes. To please her old friend, she sat up for a few minutes and shared his dinner, for he thought, and justly,

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that her faintness was owing, in some measure, to her long fast. She felt better after it, and presently they both fell fast asleep, and the dark winter afternoon passed slowly on.

It was nearly five when Grace awoke. Old Lee was pouring hot water into a brown tea-pot, and turned as she stirred. "Eh, dear, you've had a nice long sleep; it's just upon five, and tea time. I always like a cup of tea at five. How do you feel now?"

"Much better, thank you: I am so much obliged to you!" and the child's eyes swam with grateful tears. Lee, who seemed to have a nervous horror of tears, turned hastily away, and began toasting a slice of bread, and Grace sat up, and watched him in silence.

"It's snowing fast," he said at length, and she started with a sudden gesture of fear.

"Snowing; oh! I wonder where Margery is." Going to the window, she drew aside the tattered curtain and looked out. It was too dark to see into the court, but flakes of snow were lying on the ledge, and clinging to the glass. For some minutes she stood gazing into the dark night, choking back the bitter sobs; and then, dropping the curtain, returned to the fireside.

"I used to love the snow when I was a boy," said the old man. "Fine times we used to have, snow-

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balling and making snow-men. The first penny I ever earned was for sweeping the snow from a neighbour's door-step. I didn't do it for money; I was only a little chap about six, and my mother gave me a broom, and told me I might go and sweep the path in front of the house, and then I thought I might as well do our neighbour's step and path too. I liked it—it was fun for me; but I was very proud when the old lady called me in, and gave me a cake and a penny. I remember I ate the cake at once, and then was so ashamed that I hadn't saved some for my little sister, that I went and bought some sugar-candy with the penny, and gave it all to her."

"What was your little sister's name?" asked Grace.

"Annie; she was two years younger than I was, but we always played together, and she learned her letters before I did. She was a quick little thing, was Annie."

"Is she alive now?"

"No, no; she died many years ago, when she was about your sister's age. She was always delicate and ailing, and then she had a great trouble, and it killed her."

Grace's face grew very pitiful. "Did some one die that she loved?"

"Die! no, worse than that. She would rather he had died." The strange, bitter pathos of the old man's

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voice startled Grace, and with sweet, instinctive sympathy she laid her hand on his. She little guessed that it was the shameful dishonour of her loved and only brother that had caused Annie's death; but so it was.

"You would have loved Annie," continued old Lee: "she was so good—so gentle. When she had one of her bad attacks, she used to get mother to sing to her. I remember being woke up one night by hearing her singing that hymn of yours, 'Leave, ah! leave me not alone.' That line has often rang in my ears since."

Grace murmured, half unconsciously,—

"'Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, ah! leave me me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.'"

"Ah! that's it; go on."

"'All my trust on Thee is stayed;
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.

'Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick, and lead the blind:

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Just and holy is Thy name ;
I am all unrighteousness :
False and full of sin I am ;
Thou art full of truth and grace.

'Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin ;
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within :
Thou of Life the Fountain art ;
Freely let me take of Thee ;
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.'"

There was silence in the little room for some minutes, and then Lee spoke abruptly, "Do you know any more?"

"Any more hymns?" Oh, yes ; lots ! shall I sing another?"

The old man nodded assent ; and, after a moment's thought, Grace began with her gentle, childish voice—

"'Just as I am,—without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,—
O, Lamb of God, I come!

'Just as I am,—and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot ;
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,—
O, Lamb of God, I come!

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'Just as I am,—though toss'd about,
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings within, and fears without,—
O, Lamb of God, I come!

'Just as I am,—poor, wretched, blind:
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,—
O Lamb of God, I come!

'Just as I am,—Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve!
Because Thy promise I believe,—
O Lamb of God, I come.

'Just as I am,—Thy love, I own,
Hath broken every barrier down,
Now to be Thine; yea, Thine alone,—
O Lamb of God, I come!'"

"Ah," sighed the old man, "it's all right for you to say such words,—you've never sinned and done wrong as others have; it's easy for you to say, 'O Lamb of God, I come!'"

Grace looked up in astonishment. "Why, what should any one go to Jesus for, if they hadn't sinned! It's just because we want to be washed clean in Jesus' blood, that we do go."

"What has such a little thing as you done? you don't know much about sin, I reckon."

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"Yes, I do," she replied sorrowfully, "I think I'm often wicked! I get so cross, sometimes; Margery says it is because I am not well; but I don't think that is any real excuse: do you?"

"I?" said the old man, hastily; "I—I don't think the Lord will be hard upon such a little thing as you. He has got enough to do with old men like me, who've been bad all their lives.

"Have you been bad?" asked Grace wistfully.

"Not worse than many, perhaps, but bad enough,—Ay, bad enough, child!"

"Paul said he was worse than others,—the chief of sinners,—but he loved Jesus afterward, and was such a good man. Margery says father used to call him *a splendid character:* do you think he 's a splendid character?"

"I suppose he was," answered Lee, upon whose mind came crowding long-buried memories of the Bible lessons in the little Sunday-School under the elms. "But I used to like John the best,—he was so fond of the Master."

"Yes, he leaned upon Jesus' bosom! I remember, oh! I *love* him the best! Won't it be nice when we get to heaven, to see him, and talk to him? I shan't be afraid to speak to him, but I think I shall be a little bit afraid of Paul; I don't seem to know him so well."

"How do you know you are going to heaven?"

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asked the old man; and then was ashamed of the question, as the child's pure eyes looked wonderingly at him.

"I know because Jesus says so;" she replied softly, "He says He is going to have all those who love him to live with Him in His Father's mansions."

"Then you love Him, little one?"

"Yes," she answered simply, though evidently surprised at the question.

"But do you think He cares for you—a poor little girl like you? He's got so many to care for, why should He trouble himself about you?"

For a moment the fair little face clouded, but only for a moment. "I don't know why He loves me,—because He is so good I suppose; but He says in the Bible 'I love them that love Me, and they that seek Me early shall find Me,' so I *know* that He does love me."

The old man made no reply, and Grace gazed dreamily into the fire. At every step on the stairs she turned her head to listen, but the evening wore on, and Margery did not come.

"Don't you think you had better go to bed?" asked old Lee at length, as he noticed the weary droop of the little head, and the dark shadow under her eyes. "Your sister won't be home till late, perhaps."

Grace rose at once, for she longed for the solitude

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of her own room, where she might cry without any one seeing her.

Mrs. Whalley opened her door as she reached the landing. "Aint yer sister come yet? You'd better go to bed and forget all about it: she'll come home safe enough."

In their hearts both Lee and Mrs. Whalley believed that Margery had gone off "on the spree," as they called it, and would return when she had had enough. It was, perhaps, a natural conclusion, for they knew nothing of her true character. Though they had been in the house with her for months, they scarcely ever saw her: she went to work early in the morning, and did not return till late, and an occasional rencontre on the stairs afforded little opportunity for the cultivation of neighbourly intimacy, even had Margery wished it, which she did not.

For two or three hours Grace lay awake, listening intently to every sound; but overcome at last by weakness and intense drowsiness she fell asleep.

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CHAPTER THE THIRD.

She awoke the next morning with an overpowering sense of dread. Something had happened, or was going to happen: which was it?

She raised herself with a bewildered air, and looked round. Ah! that vacant place beside her! it told her all, and brought back the memory of the previous day's fruitless search; and sinking back on her pillow, she covered her face with her hands.

"What shall I do!" she cried, while scalding tears rolled down her cheeks. "Oh, Jesus! when father

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died he said You would take care of me! Please bring Margery back to me."

With a sudden start she rose, and began to dress. The warm shawl and worn little straw hat were put on, and with a heart beating high with hope, she opened the door and knocked at Mrs. Whalley's room.

"Come in," cried a rough voice, but Grace no longer feared it. Opening the door she went in. Whalley and his wife were at breakfast, and there was a fragrant smell of coffee and herrings.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Where are you going?" said Mrs. Whalley, drawing a chair to the fire. "Come and sit down and have some herring—real Yarmouth bloaters!!"

"No thank you, I can't stop," replied Grace, with the light of excitement in her eyes, and a flush on her cheek. "I'm going to look for Margery. If she comes while I'm away, will you tell her, please, that I'm looking for her, and will be back soon."

"Bless the child! why where on earth are you going to look for her? You might as well look for a needle in a haystack!" ejaculated Whalley.

"I am going to the shop again," replied Grace steadily, "and I shall ask to see the girls who work with her; perhaps they know something about her."

"Can you find yer way?" asked Mrs. Whalley, bringing her a cup of steaming coffee.

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"Yes; I went yesterday you know, and I think I can find the way again; at any rate I can ask."

The snow lay thick and white on the house-tops, but in the streets below it was trampled already to a dirty uncomfortable slush. A bitter blast of east wind met Grace at the entrance of the court, and for a moment took her breath away. Clinging to a lamp-post for support she coughed violently, shivering from head to foot. The passers-by looked at her curiously, and an old woman told her harshly to go home.

In a few minutes she again started on her way; but the snow flakes were coming down silently, but swiftly, and everything looked so different from what it had done the day before that she scarcely knew where she was going.

Faster and faster came the snow flakes, and her hands and feet became numb and stiff, yet she pressed on. Past the Foundling and down the quiet street, she went with trembling limbs. Surely this was the way she went yesterday!

At last she stopped, bewildered, and looked round. Somehow she must have taken the wrong turn, for she had never been there before.

Retracing her steps she turned to the right and wandered on till she came to a large square. On the steps of a large house close by her, a little girl in a bright scarlet cloak and seal hat, was gathering the

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freshly-fallen snow from the iron railings, and rolling it up into a ball. She had a bright, pretty little face, and Grace watched her with interest.

The ball was rapidly increasing in size, till at last it became so big that the tiny hands could not hold it, and it fell down the steps and rolled on the pavement. With a merry shout the child sprang after it; but Grace was before her, and picking it up held it shyly out with both her hands.

"Thank you," said the little lady graciously, "it's rather too big, isn't it? I'm making it for Nellie to see—my little sister you know. She 's too little to come out and make one for herself. There she is at the window."

A lady stood at one of the upper windows, with a rosy little baby-girl in her arms. They both laughed merrily as the little snowball-maker jumped about on tiptoe holding up the huge ball for them to see.

"That's my mamma," she said to Grace; "I'm going for a walk with her, only she isn't ready yet; I'm always ready first. Are you going for a walk?"

"No, I'm going to look for my sister."

"Does she live here,—in Russell Square?" asked the child, looking with sympathy into Grace's tear-stained face.

"No; she 's a dressmaker, and works for Mrs.

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Green; but she hasn't been home since Saturday morning, and I don't know where she is."

A quick sob choked her voice, and the little girl looked pitifully at her.

"Don't cry," she said earnestly, "perhaps she's come home while you've been away."

"Miss Gertrude, your mamma says you are to come in at once," interrupted a sharp voice behind them.

Grace shrank back as an elderly woman appeared at the door, and held her hand toward the little girl, "Come, my dear, you know your mamma doesn't like you to talk to street children."

"Oh, but nurse, the poor little girl has lost"—

The door banged to, and Grace heard no more. With quivering lips and aching heart she wandered on, trying to summon up courage to ask the way to Mrs. Green's street. Leaving the square, she came at last to a busy, bustling street. The noise of the numerous vehicles bewildered her, and she scarcely knew which way to turn.

Calling up all her courage, she paused by the side of a gentleman who stood hailing a cab, "If you please, Sir,—" she began, but in a quick, imperative tone he stopped her.

"I don't want any,—be off with you."

"Don't want any what?" thought Grace, shrinking back frightened.

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She walked slowly on, looking up into the faces of the passers-by, in hope of finding one kindly face. Wrapped up in coats and shawls, and hurrying on intent only on their own business, men and women passed the forlorn-looking little figure, never heeding its wistful, appealing eyes.

Ah, little Grace, this is a hard, hard world! Oxford Street is not the only one that listens to the sighs of orphans and drinks the tears of children!

Again and again the child started forward to ask the question,—"Will you please tell me the way to L—— Street;" but sometimes the words died on her lips, and sometimes the person whom she addressed thought she was begging, and took no notice of her almost inaudible words. One old gentleman listened kindly, and told her she had better ask a policeman, for he had never heard of L—— Street.

There was a policeman a little further on, and Grace went up to him. He looked very stern, and as she timidly touched his arm, turned round abruptly with a severe "Now, what do you want?" which startled her so, that she could not speak. He passed on and she leaned against a lamp-post with a strange dim mist coming over her eyes. The cold wind beat full upon her, and she coughed violently. Then there came a strange faint feeling and a voice that seemed far away said,—"What's the matter, little one?" and she knew no more.

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But strong arms caught the insensible little form as it swayed and would have dropped, and the gentleman, whose voice had fallen upon her almost unconscious ear, hailed a passing cab.

"What's the matter?" asked the crowd, arrested for one moment, and the careless answer was returned, "A little girl broke a blood vessel: they've taken her to the hospital."

In a little white cot in the "children's ward" of one of our large hospitals they laid little Grace, and soon a skilled physician was bending over her.

The nurse stood by, waiting for the words that would tell of life, or death, to this little waif, whom the great ocean of life had washed to their feet.

The fiat had gone forth from the Master's lips, "Bring her home," and the messenger was waiting to fulfil his Lord's command.

"How long?" asked the nurse, and the doctor answered briefly, "A few days at the longest."

He passed out, after giving a few directions, and found his friend who had brought the child there. "She has come too late for us to do her any good," he said in answer to the inquiring look that met him. "Poor little thing! it's the old story of disease accelerated by want of proper nourishment. We might truly write over such cases—Died of starvation."

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His friend looked incredulous. "Starvation! scarcely that, I should think."

"Well, disease is there certainly: but what caused it?—Want of proper food; and when a person dies from want of food, we are accustomed to call it starvation."

"Do you really mean that that little girl is dying of starvation?"

"I mean to say she is dying from want of food and nourishment; call it what name you like," replied the doctor steadily.

"Poor little thing! But surely this must be a very exceptional case."

"In the year eighteen hundred and seventy three, one hundred and seven persons died in London of starvation."

"One hundred and seven!" ejaculated his friend in astonishment. "It is incredible!"

"Nevertheless it is perfectly true. Come and question this child when she is conscious and judge for yourself. I can tell you pretty well what she has been living upon the last few months."

"What?"

"Weak tea and dry bread, and not enough of that."

"Dr. James, if what you say is true, there must be some strange mismanagement somewhere! I am sure,

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as a nation, we pay enough to keep our poor from dying of starvation. It is shameful!"

The doctor smiled slightly. "The channels of London charity are wide and deep, but perhaps there are not sufficient ramifications. At any rate they do not extend far enough to reach many cases of destitution and want. A patient of mine, a decent, respectable working man, came here again and again, and yet seemed to get no stronger. He had met with an accident, but nothing serious, and he ought to have been able to go to work in a few weeks; but there he was, week after week, as feeble as ever. I asked him what food he took, but he evaded the question somehow. I got it out of his wife, however, and found as I had expected, that he had been living on slops, weak tea and toast. No wonder he didn't get strong. I found it out just in time to prevent his falling into a decline."

"Ah, that is the most difficult class to help, I should imagine; the really deserving poor. They hate to apply for charity; it wounds their self-respect. Now look here, doctor, the next time you have such a case apply to me. I could give the poor fellow better medicine than your drugs and pills. Beef and mutton would be more his style. Well, good morning; I'll come and see that little girl to-morrow."

He went out with a thoughtful face, and the doctor returned to his patients.

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The prattle of childish voices was the first sound that fell on Grace's ear, as she recovered consciousness, and she looked round completely bewildered. The large, cheerful room was so different from anything she had ever seen before. Down each side were ranged little white cots, like the one in which she was lying, and in some of them children were sitting up and playing merrily with various toys, which were placed on boards across the cots. Down the centre of the room were long tables, and lovely flowers arranged in tall vases on them. Over each cot-head was hung a coloured picture; and looking at the one opposite her, Grace saw that it was Jesus raising the ruler's little daughter.

"I wonder what mine is?" she thought, and languidly raising herself she turned to look. The effort however was too much, and she sank back on the pillow, though not before she had caught a glimpse of the Good Shepherd carrying a little weary lamb in His arms.

"I like my picture best," she murmured, "I'd rather be carried; I'm so tired."

"Poor little lamb, I expect you are hungry as well as tired," said a gentle voice, and the nurse with a cup of nice strengthening food stood beside her.

The warm nourishment brought a faint colour to

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Grace's pale cheeks, and propped up with pillows she watched with great interest the novel scene before her. A little white face in the cot next her own attracted her attention, and after hesitating a short time she spoke,—

"Have you been here long?"

"Oh yes, weeks and weeks!" replied the child feebly.

"What is the matter with you?" said Grace gently.

"I was burnt." The little thing closed her eyes as if sleepy and Grace was silent. One by one the children fell asleep, and night settled on the quiet world within, as on the busy one without. The nurse came to her side and asked her how she felt, and Grace eagerly stretched out her hand.

"Please, oh! please, can any one go to my home and tell Margery where I am?"

"Who is Margery, dear, and where is your home?" The nurse sat down as she spoke, and listened to the child's excited tale.

"Hush, dear, don't cry," she said soothingly, as Grace burst into a flood of tears. "We will make inquiries about your sister and bring her back to you. I cannot send to your home to-night, it is too late, but I will the first thing to-morrow morning. Now you must try and go to sleep."

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Grace looked searchingly up in her face, and apparently satisfied, laid back with a faint "Thank you."

An hour after she was fast asleep, and as the nurse stood for one moment beside her, covering up one thin little arm that had been flung across the pillow, she heard the name "Margery" half sobbed from the parted lips, and saw that the long eye-lashes were yet wet with tears.

But Margery had not returned. The messenger the nurse had sent came back alone, and the little sister's heart sank. All day long she watched the door, hoping and longing, each time it opened, that the dearly-loved face would appear.

The gentleman who had brought her there came to see her, bringing a basket of dainties just suitable for the little invalid's failing appetite.

"And how are you now, my little friend?" he asked, sitting down beside the cot.

"Much better, thank you, Sir," she replied gratefully, for the nurse had told her who he was.

"How came you to be out alone such a bitter cold morning as yesterday's?"

"I was obliged to go alone, Sir, there was no one to go with me. I was looking for Margery."

"And pray who is Margery?"

"My sister, Sir."

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The patient little face looked so sad that the gentleman knew he had touched a sore point.

"Is she younger than you?—how was it you were looking for her? where had she gone?"

"I don't know, Sir; she is older than I am, and works at dressmaking. She went out on Saturday morning and has never come back."

"And you had gone to look for her! Can you tell me where she worked? I will make inquiries."

"Dr. James has already caused inquiries to be made," said the nurse quietly. "I told him all about it this morning, and he said he would see about it at once."

"Oh!" exclaimed Grace, clasping her hands with delight, "then she'll soon come!"

They both smiled at the child's simple confidence in the omnipotence of the doctor's promise to "see about it at once."

While they were talking, the door opened and a girl with a careworn face entered, looking earnestly round. She did not at first notice the group at the further end, but Grace caught sight of her and a quivering cry of unutterable gladness rang through the ward,

"Margery! Oh, Margery!"

Margery sprang forward, and speechless with emotion took her little sister in her arms. For some

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moments neither could speak, and then almost delirious with joy Grace gasped out,

"I knew you'd come! I knew you'd come! Oh, Margery where have you been?"

"Hush, hush," said the nurse kindly. "My child, you will do yourself serious harm if you are not quiet."

With both Margery's hands clasped in hers, Grace lay back on the pillow. "I will never let you go again! never Margery! Say you won't leave me!"

"My darling, I must; they won't let me stay here, but I may come every day and sit with you. My poor little darling! my little Grace!"

"Tell me all about it,—where have you been? Why didn't you come before?"

"I couldn't," said Margery sadly, and colouring as she saw that the strange gentleman was also listening.

"Couldn't! have you been ill, Margery?"

"No; I've been in prison, Grace." Margery spoke softly, dropping her voice at the word prison.

"Prison, Margery!"

"Yes dear, prison! They took me there on Saturday night, so I couldn't come home. I will tell you all about it. You know I helped the girls to make their new dresses for a ball of some sort?"

"Yes, go on."

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"Well," said Margery soberly, "I didn't know how they could afford to buy new dresses of that sort, and I told them so. Lucy Marks said they had been saving up for months, and I believed her, but it wasn't true—at least not quite; they had saved enough to buy the muslin, but they took the trimming—stole it from Mrs. Green's shop. She has missed a great many things lately, and was determined to find out who took them; so she set some one to watch, and they saw Lucy take some pearl beads. The girls wanted me to go and see the dresses finished, and I went, just intending to peep at them, and then run home to you; but Mrs. Green came after us with two policemen, and they searched the room and found lots of things out of the shop. They wouldn't believe me when I said I knew nothing about it, and the girls declared they had bought the things, so we were all taken off. Oh, Gracie! I thought my heart would break!"

"Poor Margery! go on, please," said Grace tenderly.

"I tried to get them to promise to go and tell you that I was ill and couldn't come home. I thought you would be so frightened if you knew I was in prison; but they took no notice. The girls kept on denying that they had stolen the things, so my denial was looked upon in the same light as theirs. I do not

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know what would have become of me, if Dr. James had not inquired about it. He came this morning to the prison and saw us, and I told him all I knew. Then he talked so kindly to the other girls that they began to cry, and confessed everything; poor girls! it is a lesson they will never forget. Dr. James went away then, and after a bit he came back with another gentleman, and the girls had to tell it all over again. They didn't like to, but he made them, and then he brought me here."

Overcome by excitement and the revulsion of feeling, poor Margery laid her face on the pillow and sobbed like a little child.

Grace smoothed back her hair and kissed her wet cheek as if she were some long lost treasure—and so in truth she was.

"Don't cry any more, Margery," she whispered, "it's all right now. When I'm well again, you'll let me come to the work-room with you, won't you?"

"To take care of me?" asked Margery, lifting up her head with a faint smile.

Grace did not answer, and a white ashen hue spread over her face.

Margery turned to the nurse in quick alarm. "What is it?" she whispered. "I never saw her look like that before!"

"She will be better directly," said the nurse,

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pouring a cordial down the child's throat. "She must be kept very quiet; it 's the excitement of seeing you."

Margery sat quietly by the cot side, watching her little sister, who held her hand as if she would never let it go. Presently Grace opened her eyes and smiled, but did not speak.

"You musn't talk, darling; the nurse says you must be very quiet. Would you like me to read to you?"

Grace smiled assent; and taking out a well-worn little pocket Testament, Margery read—

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

"But he that entereth in by the door is the Shepherd of the sheep.

"To Him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear His voice: and He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

"And when He putteth forth His own sheep He goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know His voice.

"And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

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"All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

"I am the door: by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

"I am the Good Shepherd,—"

"Yes," interrupted Grace lifting up her hand; "there He is, Margery—look."

Margery raised her eyes wonderingly and saw the picture hanging at the head of the cot.

"Would you like it hung where you can see it? Shall I hang it on the opposite wall, and then you can lie and look at it?" asked the nurse kindly.

"Oh no, thank you; I would much rather have it over my head," replied Grace eagerly, with a bright flush coming to her face. "If it were over there it wouldn't seem to mean me. That little girl's picture says she is going to get well; is she?"

"Yes, she is getting well very fast; but they don't really mean anything like that, dear."

"I know, but I like to think they do. I like to think I am one of Jesus's lambs, and that He will carry me in His arms; it must be so nice to be carried like that."

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Grace looked wistfully at the picture, for Margery had taken it down, and was holding it before her.

"The little lamb looks so happy—so rested, doesn't it, Margery? And see how the shepherd watches it; he loves it, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he loves it dearly," replied the nurse, for Margery could not answer.

"I wonder where he is taking it to," continued the child dreamily; "to the green pastures and still waters I should think; to the happy land. Won't it be glad when it gets there! dear little lamb."

The nurse looked at her earnestly, wondering if she understood the real meaning of the picture, but the next words satisfied her.

"He'll carry me too, won't He, Margery? I'm nearly ten years old, but I'm so small for my age that He's sure to call me one of the little ones, isn't He?"

"Yes, my darling; the Good Shepherd will carry you in His arms," murmured Margery, smoothing back the soft, fair hair from the little one's forehead.

"Good-bye, little lamb," said Grace resigning the picture to the nurse, to be hung up in its place. "We are both going home—you and I; I'm so glad!"

Margery bent over her. "Gracie, you said you were going to get well, and come and take care of me!"

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"Did I? oh! so I did,—I forgot; but Margery—"

The blue eyes looked wistfully into the sister's face, as if beseeching her to know the truth, and Margery understood the mute appeal.

"I don't know how to give you up, Gracie!" she whispered, kissing the little, transparent hand. "Do you want to go, darling?"

"I don't want to leave you, Margery; you'll be lonely in the evenings without me, won't you? But then Jesus will be sure to send something to help you, like He sent my nice thoughts."

For some time the sisters were silent; both thinking of the future, but with what different feelings! Margery, with aching heart was thinking of the long weary days and lonesome nights that would now be hers; of the little room deprived of its one ray of sunshine—of the vacant seat—the unused cup and plate!

But Grace! ah, Grace was following in spirit the little lamb home to the fold. With vivid imagination she fancied it welcomed by the songs of angels, and led rejoicing to the foot of the great white throne. With curious pleasure she followed it through pleasant gardens and shady groves, for in the child's mind was an inseparable connection between the little lamb and herself. In its future she saw her own.

The nurse, who had been attending to the child in

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the neighbouring cot, came forward and put her hand on Margery's shoulder.

"Are you going back to work for Mrs. Green?" she asked.

"I don't know; I don't know whether she will have me," replied Margery, despondingly.

"If you like I can find you plenty of work;—plain sewing or dressmaking. You are a dressmaker your little sister tells me."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, will you work for me? Then you can sit with Grace all day, instead of going to Mrs. Green's."

It was not in accordance with the rules, but the kind-hearted woman knew that the child's days were numbered, and longed to comfort the poor sister.

Margery's heart swelled with gratitude, and with eyes overflowing with thankful tears, she prepared to leave the hospital for the night.

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CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

WEDNESDAY was visitors' day at the Hospital, and the sisters were both interested and amused.

The burnt child, who had been too tired to talk to Grace on the night of her entrance, had a rosy-cheeked, rough-haired little country cousin sitting by her cot, and gazing round in wonderment.

"What a nice place!" she exclaimed at last. "I guess you don't want to get well, Abby, do you? Do they let you play with all those beautiful toys?"

"Yes," replied the little invalid, who was bright

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enough then; "any we like. Aren't they lovely! one of the Queen's children sent 'em for us."

"Well, I'd like to be bad, and come here," said little rough-head decisively. "Not very bad, you know,—just a tiny bit bad, so that I could play about all day."

"But they wouldn't have you unless you were dreadful ill; some of 'em die, they're so ill."

"Do they?" and the rosy face grew grave. "I read a tale once about a little boy in an hospital; shall I tell it you?"

"Yes, do," said Abby, who in common with all children loved stories.

"Well, you see he was very bad, so bad that he was going to die. And one day some one told him—I forget 'zactly what, but something about Jesus walking in the room—"

"It's not a room, it's a ward," interrupted Abby.

"Well, ward, then, it's all the same. They said Jesus walked down the ward every night to look at the children, and the little boy wanted to know if he could stop Jesus. I forget the rest, only the next morning the nurse saw his arm put out—*so*, and when she went to put it under the clothes the little boy was dead. Don't you see, he put out his arm to stop Jesus, and Jesus did stop, and carried him away."

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Abby looked awe-struck. "Would you like to see him walking down the ward?" she whispered.

"No!—yes I would, though; he wouldn't hurt me, He's good. I shouldn't like Him to take me away, though."

Grace looked at Margery and smiled. "She doesn't know what a lovely place He took the little boy to, does she Margery? Do you think it's true? does Jesus really walk in the ward at night, to take the very ill children away?"

"Yes, I think it's quite true; but I think He's here in the day time, too."

"Yes," pursued Grace; "He was so fond of little children when He was on earth that I expect He likes to come here just to see how kind people are to them. Don't you think he'll say something nice to them—to the kind people I mean—when they go to heaven, for taking such care of poor little children? I do."

"Here's some one come to see you, dear," said the nurse, and turning her head languidly, Grace saw old Lee standing beside her cot.

"I'm very glad to see you!" she said gladly; "it's very kind of you to come! won't you sit down?"

The old man took the little hand which she held out, and sat down. "I wish I'd been at home that morning," he said; "you shouldn't have gone out alone if I'd been there."

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"Then I shouldn't have come here," replied Grace gently; "and I like being here, Mr. Lee."

"Well, you make haste and get strong again," he answered, scarcely knowing what to say.

The child looked wistfully at him, "I shall never get strong again, Mr. Lee. Didn't Margery tell you? I 'm going to see John, and Paul, and all the others."

Margery took up her work and went to sit by the side of a friendless little one, thinking the old man would feel more at ease with Grace alone.

"Yes, she told me," he said; "but I thought may-be the doctors had made a mistake; they often do; so I came to see for myself how you were."

"Thank you," said Grace feebly, and then there was a long pause, for neither knew what to say to the other. At last Grace spoke. "Won't you go in and see Margery, sometimes, Mr. Lee? she'll be very lonely when I am gone."

"She won't want to see me! she's too good!"

"Too good!" and Grace looked astonished.

"Yes, didn't I tell you that I have been a bad man nearly all my life; she won't care to have anything to do with me."

Grace looked distressed. "But you're not bad now, are you?"

The old man made no reply, and silently large tears gathered in the child's eyes and rolled down her face.

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"Don't!" said Lee hastily, "don't cry, you'll make yourself worse."

"But, I can't bear to think you are not a good man," she gasped; "because you can't come to heaven without. Oh! please do be good!"

"I can't, little one! I don't believe the Lord would have anything to do with me if I were to ask Him!" and the old man's hands shook with emotion.

"But He says He will! He says so lots of times in the Bible, and it must be true!"

"Well, well," he replied, half to pacify her, half in earnest, "I'll read the Bible, and see what it says."

"Margery will tell you where the promises are," said Grace faintly. "I know some, but I can't remember now. There's one,—'Let the wicked forsake his way and,'—how does it go on? I forget."

"'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon!'" repeated Lee mechanically.

"Yes, that's it; He will abundantly pardon," murmured Grace. "Don't be afraid, Mr. Lee; He's the Good Shepherd, you know, and gave His life for the sheep."

Margery, who had been anxiously watching, and feared the effects of excitement on Grace's feeble

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frame, came quietly up to the cot, and Lee rose to go.

"Good bye," he said, holding the little hand tenderly. "I'm an old man and a bad one, but maybe the Lord will forgive. Good bye, little one."

Grace followed him down the ward with her eyes, and then turned with a smile to Margery.

"He was so kind to me, Margery! you'll tell him all about the promises, won't you?"

"Yes dear, I'll do anything I can for him for your sake!" Quite contented, and peacefully happy, Grace lay watching the tide of visitors ebbing and flowing. Little rough-head was taking a stormy farewell of her cousin; crying and laughing in a breath.

"I'll come and see you again soon, Abby; and I'll save you some plum pudding,—see if I don't!"

The promise of plum pudding went a long way toward consoling Miss Abby, and she dried her tears courageously. "And some nuts?" she demanded.

"Yes, nuts too, and everything!" was the magnificent answer.

"What a funny little girl," thought Grace turning her head and finding a pair of bright black eyes fixed upon her. For a few moments the children looked at each other in silence, and then the little stranger stepped close to the cot.

"Are you burnt, too?" she asked abruptly.

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"No."

"What is the matter with you, then?"

"I don't quite know," replied Grace wearily. "It's my cough, I think."

"A cough isn't much: I've had a cough, but I didn't keep in bed for it. When shall you be well?"

"I don't think I shall ever get well."

"Never! do you think you are going to die?" asked little rough-head in an awe-struck tone.

"Yes; but I'm not sorry."

"Not sorry you are going to die! I think its dreadful! Will Jesus take you like He took the little boy who put his arm out?"

"He says He will carry the lambs in His bosom,—He'll carry me."

"Where 'll He carry you?"

"To the Golden City," answered Grace with a sudden flush, and a bright light shining in her eyes.

"You mean heaven, I s'pose. Do you want to go? I think its nicer here."

"Not nicer than heaven! I shall never be sick or tired there: shall I Margery?"

"But you'll have to be good always up there! I shouldn't like to be good for ever and ever. And they won't let you play."

Grace smiled, "I don't know what I shall do there

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yet, but Jesus will let me do just what will make me happiest."

"Do you s'pose you 'll have wings? that would be nice! I 'd like to have wings."

"We are to be like angels, and they have wings," said Grace softly, and the child stood looking at her.

But Margery's anxious love was fearful lest her darling should over-exert herself, and she sent the child away.

For hours Grace lay motionless, save now and then a smile for her sister. Dr. James when he passed through the ward saw a change in the pale little face that made him pause at the nurse's side.

"You had better let that poor girl stay by the child to night," he said, and the nurse understood.

Margery, too, knew what the permission to stay meant. "My little Christmas-gift!" she murmured, and Grace heard her. Opening her eyes she smiled.

"You've kept it for ten long long years, Margery, and now you must give it back," she whispered, while a sudden spasm of pain crossed her face.

Again night closed round, and all grew hushed and still. Now and then a childish wail broke the silence, as some little one woke to pain, or fear.

"Margery!" whispered Grace, "say my evening

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hymn." Kneeling by the cot, and clasping the little hand in hers, Margery softly repeated the children's hymn:

"'Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me!
Bless Thy little lamb to-night,
Through the darkness be Thou near me;
Keep me safe till morning light.

'Through the day Thy hand has led me,—
And I thank Thee for Thy care;
Thou hast warm'd me, clothed, and fed me:
Listen to my evening prayer.

'Let my sins be all forgiven;
Bless the friends I love so well;
Take me, when I die, to heaven,
Happy there with Thee to dwell.'"

"I haven't many friends," said the child dreamily. "Only you, and Mr. Lee, and the nurse, and Jesus. Kiss me, Margery, and say good night."

"Good night, my darling! good night!"

Slowly the hours passed away, and Margery laid her weary, aching head on the pillow, close to the dear little face; and in the dim ward the little life slowly ebbed away. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was waiting for His little lamb; she was not alone.

"Is she asleep?" asked the nurse, coming noiselessly to the cot side; and Margery gestured assent.

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Yes, she was sleeping! Poor little, weary lamb!

With a gentle hand the nurse drew the sheet over the sweet, placid face, and then Margery knew her precious little Christmas-gift had returned to the Giver! Heavy shadow fell upon the sister's heart, and she refused to be comforted because her darling was not.

With motherly kindness the nurse led her into her own room, and there left her to find comfort in One who never fails His children in time of need.

In bitter grief Margery bowed her head upon her hands, and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, my darling!" she cried, "what shall I do without you! I am alone now in the wide world! You might well be glad to leave it, Gracie, for it is a weary world for such as we. Good-bye, little sister; you are with the Good Shepherd now, but I—"

Suddenly the silence was broken by a glad, jubilant sound. All the bells of the city sent forth a merry peal, and told a sinful world that Christmas-day, with its holy memories, was soon to dawn. Margery raised her head to listen. "Ten years old, to-day," she murmured; "she is spending her birthday in the Golden City she so loved to talk about! You will have better birthday presents than ever I could give you, my darling! There's a crown, and a harp, and white garments waiting for you—no, not waiting, you

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have already received your birthday presents! No more long, weary hours, darling! no more pain and sorrow, for Jesus will wipe all tears away. No more sleepless nights in the city where there is no night! Oh, Grace! little Grace! I wish I were with you there, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest!"

Still the glad bells rang on, and worn out by grief, Margery fell asleep. And as she slept, the Father, in His own way, was raising up friends for the friendless girl.

More than one heart had been touched by her sad lot, and already Dr. James and the nurse were thinking what they could do to help her.

Early the next morning Margery awoke, and wondered who had covered her with warm shawls, and put the soft pillow under her head. Even such a trifling kindness as this was very new and strange to her.

While she wondered the door opened, and the nurse entered with a cup of hot, fragrant coffee, and a plate of bread and butter. She spoke very kindly and gently to her, urging her to eat, and Margery obeyed.

"Now," said her friend, "brush your hair, and make yourself tidy, for Dr. James wants to see you."

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"Wants to see *me?*" said Margery astonished, and half frightened.

"Yes, you; you need not be afraid; there isn't a kinder man living than Dr. James."

With some inward trepidation Margery followed her down stairs. The doctor's benevolent face and kind smile somewhat reassured her and put her at ease.

In a few short words he told her why he had sent for her. "I am looking out for a superior nurse for my younger children, who could teach them their letters and so on; would you like the place, or would you rather stay here, and be trained to nurse the sick?"

For some moments Margery was silent; then looking up she asked, "Should I be in the children's ward, Sir?"

"Yes, if you preferred it."

"Then, Sir, if you please, I should like to stay here. I shall always love the hospital for my little sister's sake, and would rather be here than anywhere in the world."

"Then you shall stay."

And now began a new life for Margery. Self-controlled and quiet, she was just the one for her post. The little children soon grew to know and love her; and she, for the sake of her lost darling, took

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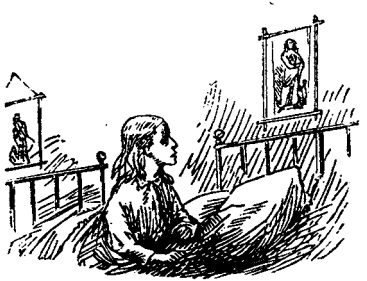
them to her heart and called them her little brothers and sisters. Throughout her useful life the sweet memory of the little sister given her for ten long years, had a softening and purifying influence.

"And evermore, to all her thoughts, a softer tone was given;
For the loved darling of her heart had entered into Heaven."



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